

Frequently Asked Question's

"Will I have less space?"

System furniture installations actually provide increased work surface and storage in a more efficient footprint.

"What about private offices?"

Private offices will be reviewed for suitability within the design, functional requirements of the position and appropriateness within the guidelines for state space. In addition, those offices that have been approved would be placed on the interior of the building to allow maximum natural light.

"Will the space be noisy?"

Fabric on panels, carpeting and the acoustic ceiling help mitigate sound transmission. However, adjustments need to be made as a result of the open plan. You need to remember to keep your voice at the proper level in consideration of your fellow employees.

"How do we have private conversations?"

Enclosed spaces are provided for this purpose. They will be strategically placed in the space for use by all staff.

"How high should panels be in the systems furniture?"

Panel heights should be kept as low as practicable to allow maximum use of natural light and to avoid problems with air circulation.

High panels can be placed perpendicular to the windows for placement of overhead storage if needed.

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NEW WORK ENVIRONMENT: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE



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Overview

Office environments in government and private industry are being designed to accommodate the most technologically advanced data systems and ergonomic environments with a watchful eye on the budget. At the same time, employees involved in office moves have come to expect they will be able to plug in and begin work within minutes of their arrival at their new location. In an effort to assist state agencies to adapt to these new challenges, the State of New York has embarked on a campaign to modernize state offices to incorporate these new technological advancements and ergonomic requirements.



This picture demonstrates the cluttered look of a traditional open office space. Note the different colored movable screens, worktables used as storage areas, extra chairs stored in aisle and the inability to locate the exit aisle from this vantage point.

The structure of how people work has changed. Teams have become the norm. Teams form for special projects or for a body of work, and they form and disband as the agency structure or policy changes demand. This changing structure requires an office design that allows flexibility, with attention to the cost of such moves.

What Kind of Dollar Savings Can Be Expected?

Over a four-year period, the Office of General Services has renovated 135,244 square feet of its usable office space at the Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza in Albany with systems furniture utilizing the open plan concept. Before the renovations were accomplished, 645 employees were housed in this space. After the renovations, 814 employees occupied the same amount of space - a savings of 20 percent. The realized dollar savings over a ten-year period is expected to be \$2,141,606.00. For every dollar spent OGS will save \$1.40.



This picture shows a different floor illustrating the effects of selecting different carpet and furniture. Note the clear view of the windows by all work stations.

The Office of General Services Offers Analytical Support

The staff of Real Estate Planning has the experience and the expertise to guide state agencies through the transition to the open space plan environment. Our staff has ample knowledge of the multiple vendors on state contract, and each agencies' mission and goals to provide the analysis, planning and design technique to support the effort. Please contact our planning unit to discuss the exciting possibilities of open space design the next time organizational or environmental changes are required in your agency.



Small meeting areas like this double as a secluded spot to make personal phone calls or have a private discussion between employees.

How Does the Open Office Design Address Privacy Concerns?

First, we must understand that while privacy is important in some office functions, there is no guarantee that an enclosed office provides audible privacy. Full height partitions provide a perception of privacy by separating the occupant from his or her co-workers. In the past, state agencies, as in the private sector, used the office as a means of establishing status for their managers without evaluating the actual need for privacy. By reevaluating the work performed, status can be provided to a majority of private office holders by the workstation design or size. Acoustical privacy can be enhanced with the use of special carpeting and acoustical systems panels. In some cases, white noise can be introduced as well as acoustical ceiling tiles to promote privacy.

Privacy needs must be balanced throughout the group. Most employees do not need privacy continually throughout their day. For those times when employees who have limited requirements for privacy need full height partitions, small, enclosed rooms called enclaves are provided. Employees are encouraged to use these rooms as workrooms when privacy is required and for personal phone calls.

Employees in the modern office require more electrical power and electronic devices than their counterparts of just 10 years ago. Purchasing, research and marketing all take place on the networks within an office and on the Internet. No longer is keyboarding delegated to the clerical staff alone. Commissioners, to Bureau Chiefs, to the Professional Office staff, produce increasingly high-tech documents on their personal computers.

Open office planning was developed as a means of providing organizational flexibility, promoting interactions among people in different units, and supporting the team concept. Conventional office layouts typically contain perimeter offices for professional staff at the middle and upper management levels with support staff located directly outside the offices. Other staff are then placed in the remaining space with movable or modular panel systems surrounding each workstation. The open office plan reduces the number of private offices significantly or eliminates them completely. The remaining staff is distributed throughout the space in workstation groups. Often, offices are placed on the interior, or core, of the building, allowing the open office staff to enjoy the natural light filtering through the windows. Lower systems furniture panel heights are utilized to promote the introduction of natural light into the space. Lower panel heights also improve the circulation of heat and air conditioning, thus making the space more comfortable for the occupants year round.



This picture illustrates an occupied systems furniture design. Note the convenient storage throughout the space as well as the clear, well-defined exit aisle that improves the safety of the employees located on the floor.

What are the Benefits of Open Office Design

Open office designs offer benefits that conventional office design cannot. These benefits are driving the state's campaign to make the change to the open office environment. The benefits of open office design include:

- Encouragement of open communication between individuals and groups
- Increased natural light and views of the outside environment for all employees
- Improved air quality control
- Ability to support advances in technology
- Increased efficiency of the workspace. Workstations are designed to meet ergonomic standards and to facilitate the tasks to be done. They are equipped to meet storage needs more economically and conveniently than a conventional workspace with its separate parts and pieces
- Opportunity to reduce the lighting glare at the workstation by improvement of the light quality and level
- Cross-training of employees
- Reduction of the costs associated with restructuring of staff within units or churn; (cost of churn includes the financial implications of the physical move, the time the move takes and the disruption to the work units involved.)
- Increased storage
- Improve office morale
- More efficient use of space, thereby reducing the amount of square footage needed and the associated real estate costs



The systems furniture installation begins on a floor after the area has undergone a make over including patching and painting of walls and ceilings and the installation of carpet tiles. This installer is checking to be sure the panels are level. Each workstation is checked thoroughly to ensure the work surface is level.

What Steps are involved in Open Office Planning?

- Discuss and analyze the agency or unit body of work and the way it functions. This might include the opportunity for a group to reorganize or validate its processes and structure.
- Design the workstations and office layout. This would include an opportunity for further discussion of how the group works or should work and the efficient layout of the units.
- Selection of a systems furniture vendor through the bidding process or via the state contract. This would include choices of carpet, paint and workstation materials to achieve a coordinated décor and set the tone for the unit.

How Is Systems Furniture Purchased?

The process for purchasing modular furniture has been designed to ensure that agencies obtain the best workstation for their needs at the best price. Vendors are invited to participate by providing a workstation designed for the agency which meets the specific needs of each agency. These “mock up” workstations are then evaluated based on a criteria developed by the agency. This ensures that the furniture will be acceptable to the agency. The best two or three vendors are then requested to submit pricing for the project and the low bid vendor is chosen for the furniture purchase.

If the landlord is purchasing the furniture as part of a lease agreement, the landlord is advised when the agency has decided on a vendor. At this point, the landlord assumes responsibility for placing the order, overseeing the delivery of the order to the site, ensuring the completeness of the order, and installation of the workstations. Typically, the consultant preparing the layouts is also responsible for developing a color scheme for the space. Two “color boards” are usually offered with colors suggested for both architectural elements such as walls and floors, as well as for workstations and miscellaneous furniture. This results in an office environment that is aesthetically pleasing as well as functional.